

Learn the Process: A Profile Piece on Professor Susan McHugh

By: Peyton Sammons

Professor Susan McHugh, an English professor at the University of New England, is one of many professors at the university that have published pieces of work.

McHugh has been teaching at UNE since the early 2000s and since then has published over five pieces, including monographs (written study on a specialized subject) and co-edited scholarly articles. With her PhD in Literary Theory and Criticism, you can find her teaching that class and several others such as Dog Stories, Narrative Medicine and Writing, Nature Films, and more.

One of her first monographs, *Dog*, was published in 2004. She signed a contract to write the book ahead of time in the same month that she signed on to start teaching at the university.

“It was my first book and you make a few mistakes with your first book. That book was a bit of awesomeness because a friend had an idea for a series, pitched it to the press in London, and it’s now in over a hundred volumes. I was the first person he approached and told me he wanted subversive people to do the normal animals,” said McHugh, followed by a hearty laugh.

Finishing the manuscript, she thought about what was specific to dogs. Check out her chapter on mutts to see how she ties in dogs to a cultural approach. The book was so popular it was even translated into five to seven different languages: French, Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, Russian, Italian, and Turkish.

This book has opened many doors for her that she has gladly walked through while also finding the balance with teaching at the same time.

“A group in India started doing a series of online talks with authors. They specifically recruited me to talk with them about the mutts chapter. They wanted to do it because the racial politics in India are starting, if anything, to become more inflamed,” McHugh said.

McHugh owes a lot of her life success to *Dog*. It even helped her pay off her student loans. Following close after its publication, her career spiraled into future success following close after *Dog*. Many of her monographs have serious topics and morals that need to be seen by the world.

“My second monograph was actually based on my dissertation and it was really hard for me to publish because no one was doing it at the time. My PhD professor told me to pick a topic that I wouldn’t get tired of talking about for the rest of my life,” said McHugh.

She believed in a lot of what she was doing which led to her various successful pieces. Some of her topics are present concerns within culture that fly under some other people’s radars, but she sticks with her heart and what she values in her pieces.

The writing world can be a tricky career path with too many ups and downs, but McHugh offered some of her best advice for students willing to go down the windy road.

“Learn the process. That was extremely helpful to me. I don’t think I would have been nearly as successful as I have been if I didn’t work my way into a teaching assistant position as well as a copy editor for a journal. Through that I learned soup to nuts how something goes through an author’s desk to print. There are a lot of people involved and appreciating the domino effect has made it so that I don’t have a prima donna attitude about writing,” McHugh advised.

Being an author can be a difficult career path, but it’s not just the author alone on the publishing journey. There are the editors and the marketing staff, so many more, that you have to take into consideration when starting your journey.

McHugh’s advice and teaching style has even inspired many students to keep pushing forward with their own writing. Not only that, but she has pushed other students out of their comfort zone to explore their writing styles more than they did originally.

“I took her Dog Stories course last spring and it really impacted me,” said Elaina Biron, sophomore nursing student. “I’m a STEM major so taking interest in an English class is a big

deal for me. She changed my perspective on writing and I find myself trying to journal once a week. I never had any reason to write, but she definitely left a mark on my outlook.”

Even though writing is a tedious process and publishing may be more difficult, don’t give up on your piece. Professor McHugh is now an author that not only has published monographs, but scholarly articles as well. So in the wise words of McHugh “learn the process” and don’t give up.